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(54) **TEMPORARY, CONFORMABLE CONTACTS FOR MICROELECTRONIC COMPONENTS**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **439/178**

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324/757, 754, 758

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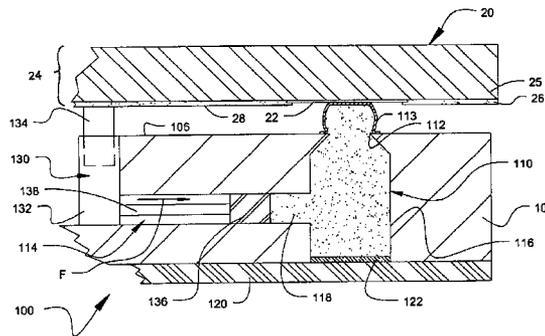
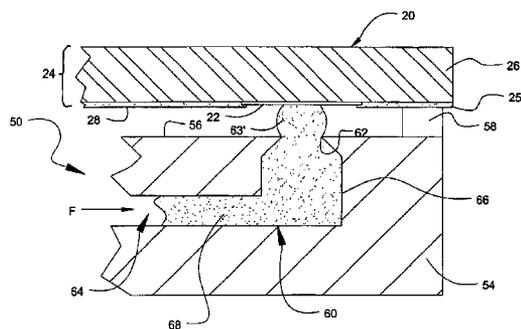
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Various aspects of the invention provide temporary interfaces for microelectronic components, microelectronic component test systems, and methods of testing microelectronic components. One of the disclosed temporary interfaces employs a substrate having a plurality of terminals and a switch layer carrying a plurality of actuatable liquid switches. These switches may be adapted to conform to a surface of a component terminal to electrically connect the component terminal to a terminal of the substrate. Another adaptation provides a microelectronic component test system including a microelectronic component including a plurality of terminals. A body is juxtaposed with, but spaced from, the microelectronic component. The body carries a plurality of conduits and a conformable conductor is associated with each conduit. Each of these conformable conductors comprises a volume of electrically conductive liquid and the associated conduit.

64 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



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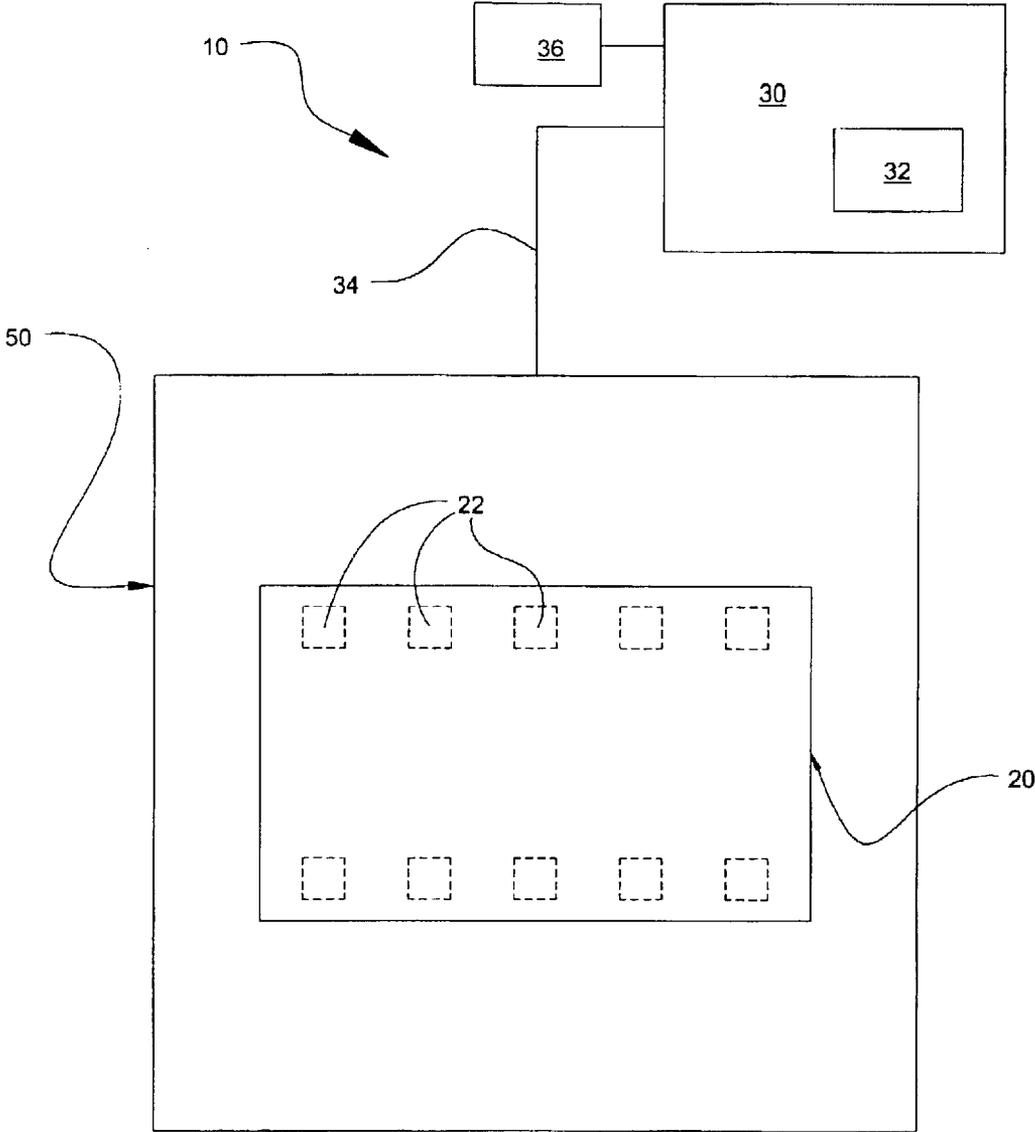


Fig. 1

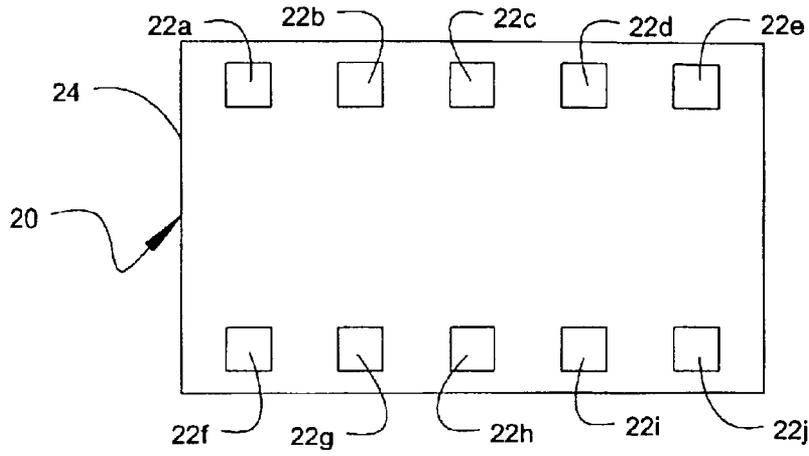


Fig. 2

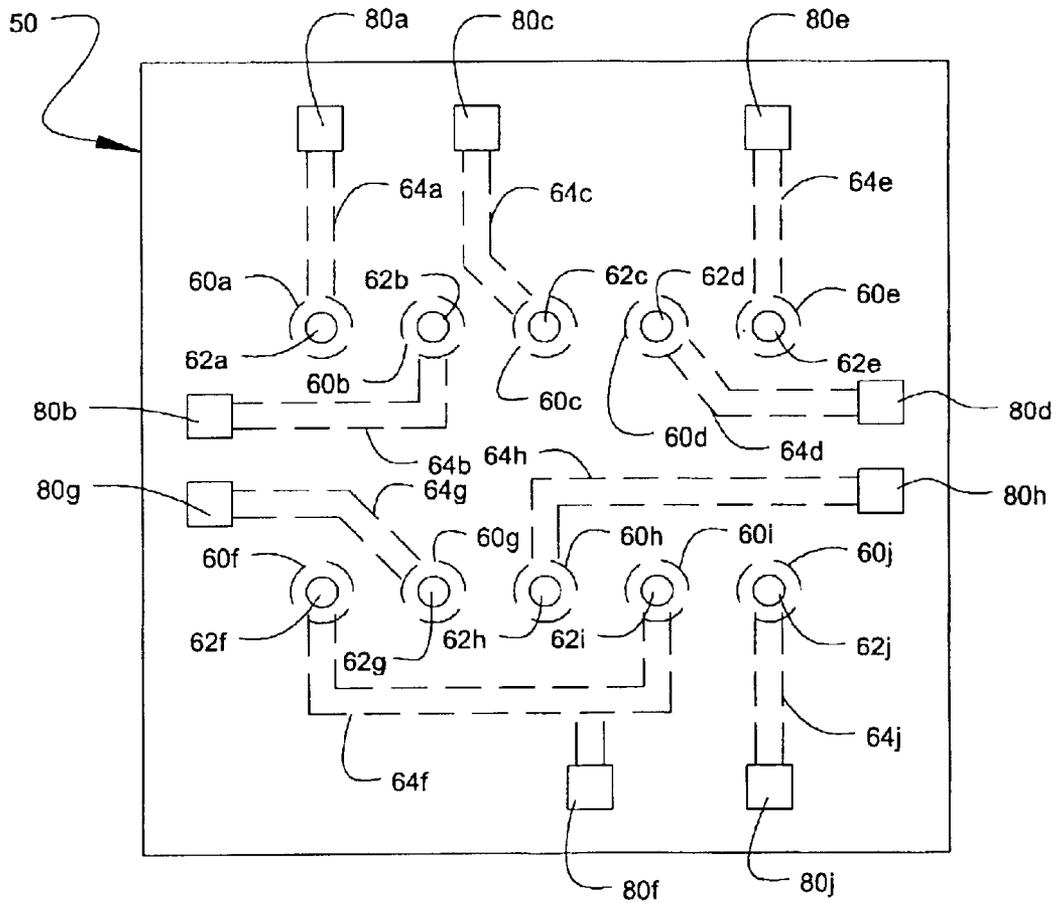


Fig. 3

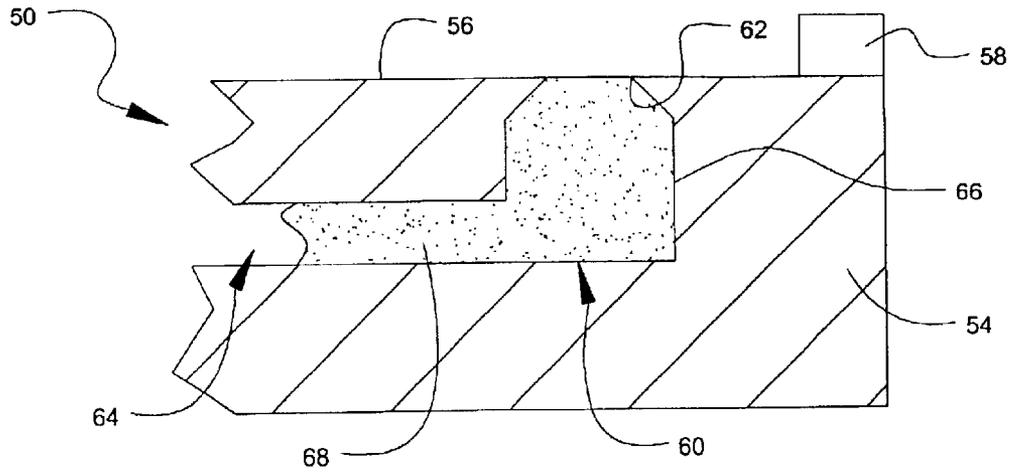


Fig. 4

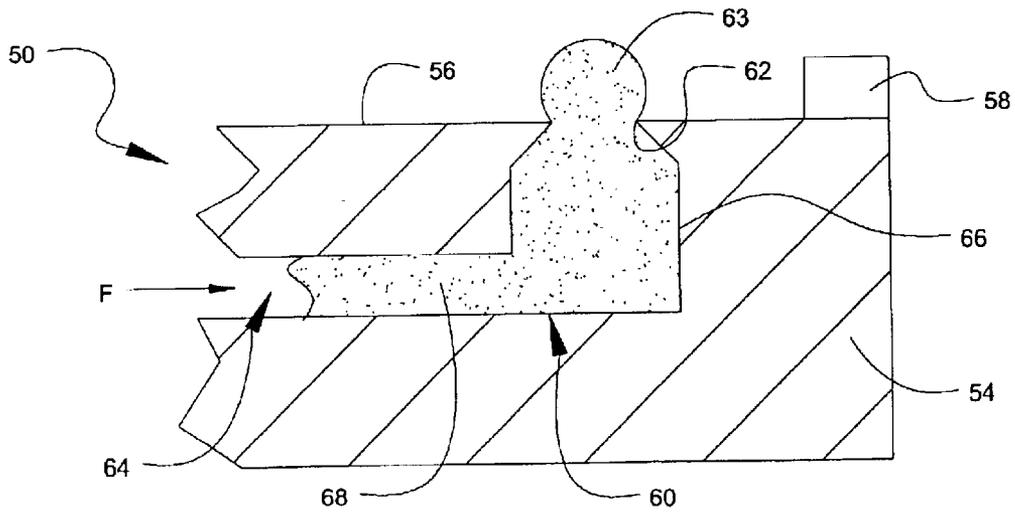


Fig. 5

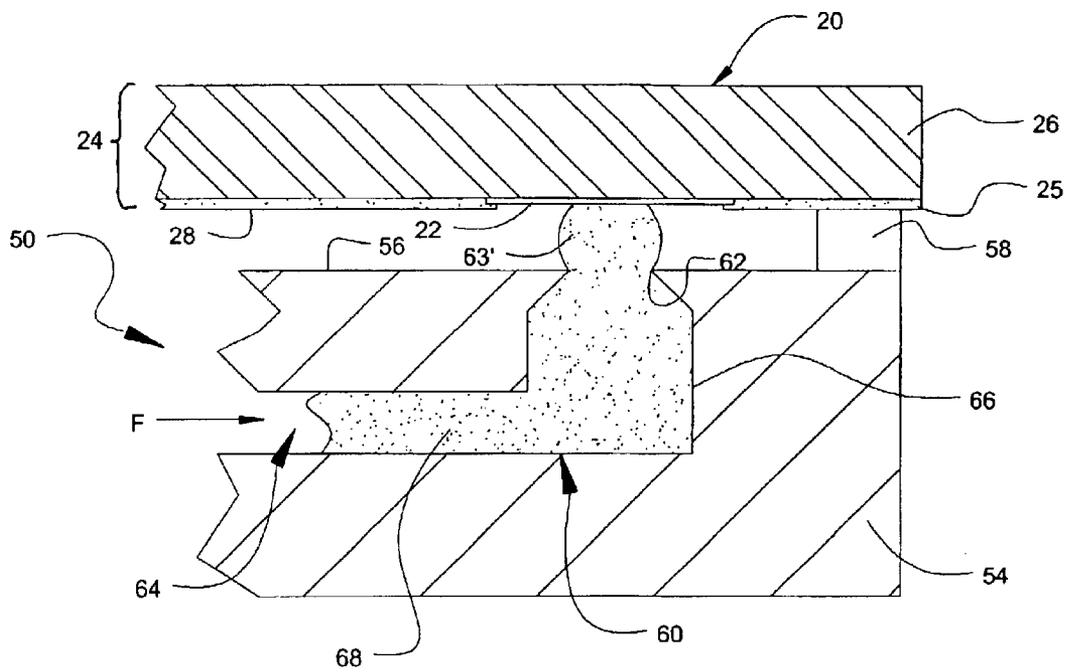


Fig. 6

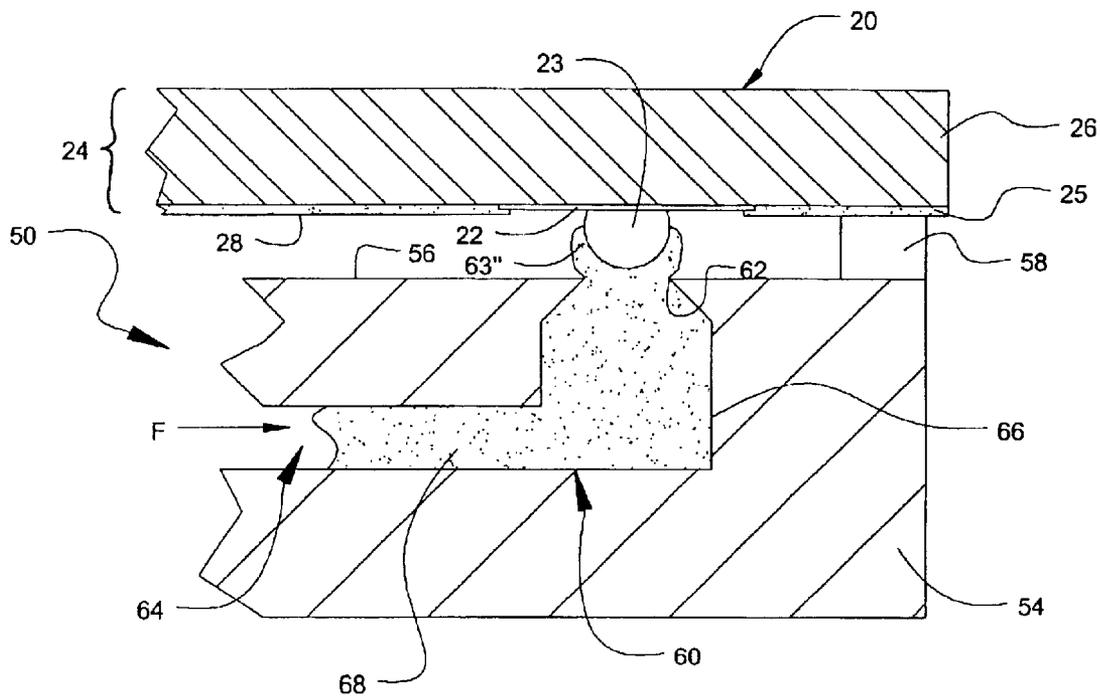


Fig. 7

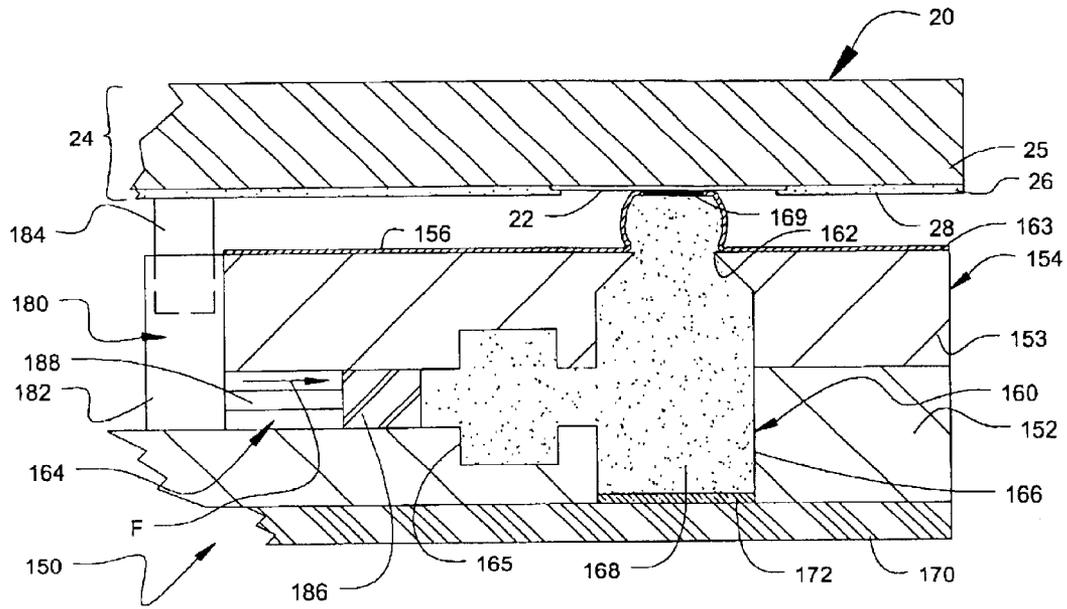


Fig. 10

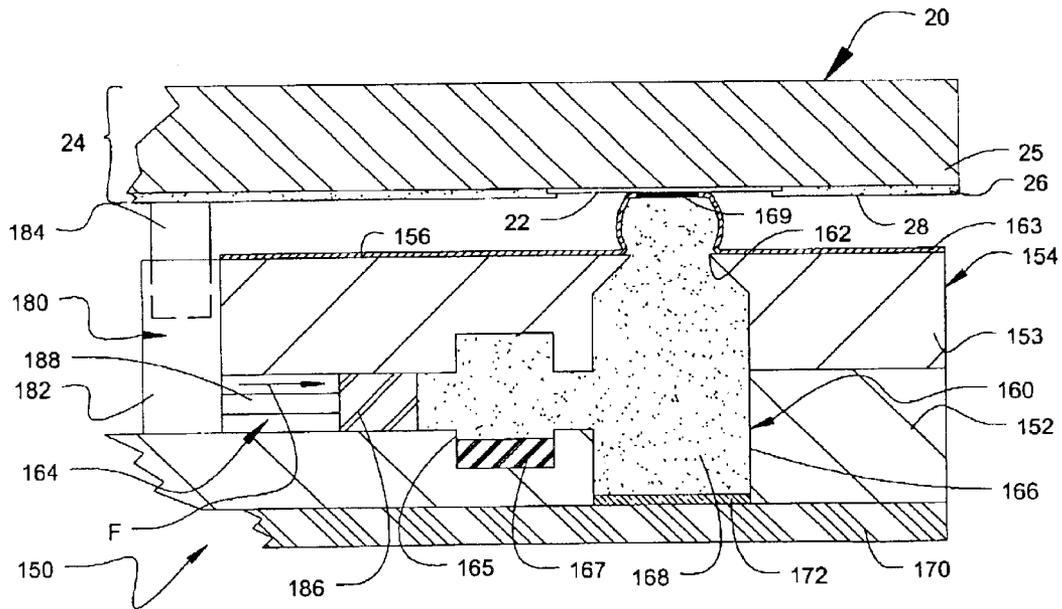


Fig. 11

TEMPORARY, CONFORMABLE CONTACTS FOR MICROELECTRONIC COMPONENTS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims foreign priority benefits of Singapore Application No. 200204730-6 filed Aug. 6, 2002, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention generally relates to forming temporary electrical connections with microelectronic components. The invention has particular utility in connection with testing microelectronic components, but can be used in a variety of other applications, as well.

BACKGROUND

The microelectronics industry is highly competitive and most microelectronics manufacturers are highly sensitive to quality and cost considerations. Most microelectronics manufacturers require that suppliers of microelectronic components test performance of each microelectronic component before shipment to minimize the manufacturer's product losses. Microelectronic components are commonly tested by establishing temporary electrical connections between a test system and electrical terminals on the microelectronic component.

One way of establishing a temporary electrical connection between the test system and the terminals on the component employs cantilevered wire probes. Such wire probes employ a stiff wire tip at the end of an elongate arm. Cantilevered wire probes are useful in some applications, e.g., in testing devices with bond pads spaced well apart from one another, but these probes do have some limitations. If the microelectronic component is a "bumped" chip having a solder ball attached to each of a series of bond pads, the mechanical force of the probe against the solder ball can damage the solder ball or the connection between the solder ball and the bond pad. This can lead to faulty electrical connections in future manufacturing steps. The minimum spacing of cantilevered wire probes is also somewhat constrained, limiting their use in testing microelectronic components with contacts that are close to one another, such as in fine ball grid array (FBGA) chips.

Another common way to temporarily electrically connect a microelectronic component to a test system employs a test card with rigid contacts. These contacts may be adapted to rigidly abut the component's contacts, e.g., a bond pad of an unbumped chip or contact solder balls on a bumped chip. Planarity of both the test card and the component contacts is of critical importance when testing unbumped chips. To ensure that the test card adequately contacts each of the bond pads, the microelectronic component must be urged toward the test card with some force. This could damage the microelectronic component under test. When testing bumped microelectronic components, the contacts on the test card may be specifically adapted to receive solder balls instead of contacting a relatively flat bond pad. These solder-specific contacts commonly scratch, squeeze, or otherwise deform the solder balls to ensure good electrical contact between the solder balls and the test card contacts. This can exert undue stress on the solder balls, damaging the solder balls or their connection to the underlying bond pads.

The trend in the industry is for terminals on microelectronic components to be spaced closer and closer together.

Many microelectronic components, e.g., FBGA chips, have solder ball pitches (i.e., the distance from the center of one solder ball to the center of the next adjacent solder ball) of 0.8 millimeters or less; the solder balls on such contacts are often 0.3 millimeters or less in diameter. These small solder balls are very susceptible to damage when being deformed by a mechanical interface on a conventional test card. Test card manufacturers also are finding it increasingly difficult to position the terminals close enough to one another to permit testing of fine-pitch microelectronic components.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of a microelectronic component test system of an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a schematic illustration of a microelectronic component to be tested.

FIG. 3 is a schematic illustration of one embodiment of a microelectronic component interface configured to test the microelectronic component of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 schematically illustrates an actuatable liquid switch which may be employed in the microelectronic component interface of FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 schematically illustrates the liquid switch of FIG. 4 in an actuated configuration.

FIG. 6 is a schematic cross-sectional drawing illustrating temporary electrical connection of the liquid switch of FIGS. 4 and 5 to a flat terminal of a microelectronic component.

FIG. 7 is a schematic cross-sectional view, similar to FIG. 6, illustrating temporary electrical connection of the liquid switch of FIGS. 4 and 5 to a bumped terminal on a microelectronic component.

FIG. 8 is a schematic cross-sectional view illustrating aspects of a microelectronic component interface in accordance with an alternative embodiment.

FIG. 9 schematically illustrates the microelectronic component interface of FIG. 8 in electrical contact with a terminal on a microelectronic component.

FIG. 10 is a schematic cross-sectional view, similar to FIG. 9, but illustrating an alternative microelectronic component interface.

FIG. 11 is a schematic cross-sectional view of the microelectronic component interface of FIG. 10 modified to accommodate a different operating condition.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A. Overview

Various embodiments of the present invention provide methods and apparatus for establishing temporary contact with microelectronic components, e.g., in testing the microelectronic components. Unless the specific context clearly requires otherwise, throughout the description and claims the terms "microelectronic component" and "microelectronic component assembly" may encompass a variety of articles of manufacture, including, e.g., semiconductor wafers having active components, individual integrated circuit dies, packaged dies, and subassemblies consisting of two or more microelectronic components, e.g., a stacked die package. The following description provides specific details of certain embodiments of the invention illustrated in the drawings to provide a thorough understanding of those embodiments. It should be recognized, however, that the present invention can be reflected in additional embodiments and the invention may be practiced without some of the details in the following description.

In one embodiment, the present invention provides a temporary interface for a microelectronic component having a plurality of component terminals in a component terminal array. This temporary interface includes a substrate and a switch layer. The substrate has a plurality of substrate terminals arranged on a terminal surface of the substrate. The switch layer carries a plurality of acutatable liquid switches arranged in a switch array corresponding to the component terminal array. Each switch is associated with one of the substrate terminals and is adapted to conform to a surface of one of the component terminals to temporarily electrically connect the component terminal to the substrate terminal associated with the switch.

A temporary interface for a microelectronic component in accordance with another embodiment includes a body having a confronting surface, a plurality of electrically independent conduits, and a volume of electrically conductive liquid in each of the conduits. Each conduit has a contact end terminating adjacent the confronting surface. The contact ends may be arranged in a contact array configured to match a terminal array of component terminals on a microelectronic component.

Another embodiment of the invention provides a microelectronic component test system which includes a microelectronic component having a terminal surface and a plurality of terminals arranged in a terminal array on the terminal surface. The system also includes a body having a confronting surface that is juxtaposed with the terminal surface of the microelectronic component such that the terminals are spaced from the confronting surface by a gap. A plurality of electrically independent conduits are carried by the body, with each conduit having a contact end terminating adjacent the confronting surface of the body at a location proximate an associated one of the microelectronic component terminals. A conformable conductor is associated with each conduit. Each conformable conductor comprises a volume of electrically conductive liquid in the associated conduit.

A microelectronic component test system in accordance with an alternative embodiment includes a body having a confronting surface, a conduit carried by the body, an electrically conductive liquid in the conduit, and an electrically conductive flexible member. The flexible member is carried by the body adjacent the confronting surface and is adapted to resiliently return from a distended position toward a relaxed position. The flexible member assumes the distended position in response to pressure of the liquid against the flexible member. The flexible member is adapted to conform to a surface of a terminal of a microelectronic component when in the distended position.

Another embodiment of the invention provides a method of testing a microelectronic component having a plurality of component terminals on a component surface. In this method, the microelectronic component is juxtaposed with an interface having an interface surface and a plurality of liquid switches; the component surface is spaced from the interface surface. Each liquid switch is electrically contacted to an associated one of the component terminals by deforming a contact surface of each switch to conform to a surface of the associated component terminal without substantially deforming the component terminals. Electricity is conducted across an electrically conductive liquid of each of the switches and this liquid electrically connects the component terminal juxtaposed with the switch to a test terminal carried by the test interface.

In another embodiment, a method of testing a microelectronic component involves juxtaposing the microelectronic

component with an interface having: an interface surface, a conduit, an electrically conductive liquid in the conduit, and an electrically conductive flexible member. When so juxtaposed, the surface of the component terminal is spaced from the flexible member by a gap. The flexible member is distended across the gap into conforming contact with the component terminal surface. Electricity is conducted across the flexible member with the flexible member in contact with the component terminal surface; the liquid and the flexible member electrically connect the component terminal to a test terminal carried by the interface.

B. Conformable Contact Systems

FIG. 1 schematically illustrates a microelectronic component test system **10** that may be used to test a microelectronic component **20**. The microelectronic component test system **10** includes a test interface **50** that is connected to a controller **30**. The test interface **50** includes a plurality of conformable contacts (not shown in FIG. 1) that may be positioned to contact electrical terminals **22** on the microelectronic component **20**. The conformable contacts may be connected to circuitry (not shown) within the interface **50** adapted to deliver power to one or more of the contacts and/or receive test signals from one or more of the contacts.

The controller **30** may communicate with the circuitry of the test interface **50** by a communication line **34**. The controller **30** may take any of a variety of forms. In one embodiment, the controller **30** comprises a computer having a programmable processor **32**. The controller **30** may be operatively coupled to a power supply **36** and control delivery of power from the power supply **36** to various components of the test interface **50** via communication line **34**. In one embodiment, a power supply **36** may be used to deliver test power to the contacts of the test interface **50** under the control of the controller **30**.

As explained more fully below, some embodiments of the invention provide selectively conformable contacts that may be extended or retracted. In some embodiments, the contacts are open and allow conductive fluid to come into direct physical contact with a terminal **22** of the microelectronic component **20**. In other applications, a flexible, conductive seal may be disposed between the conductive fluid and the microelectronic component terminal **22**. The following discussion focuses first on embodiments illustrated in FIGS. 4-7, which illustrate contacts that may directly contact the terminals **22** of the microelectronic component **20**. Next, embodiments that employ flexible, conductive seals are discussed in connection with FIGS. 8-11. Finally, several exemplary methods in accordance with other embodiments of the invention are described.

C. Open Contacts

FIG. 2 illustrates an idealized microelectronic component **20** and FIG. 3 schematically illustrates an interface **50** adapted to establish temporary electrical contact with the microelectronic component **20**, e.g., for testing purposes. The microelectronic component **20** includes a body **24** carrying a plurality of terminals **22a-j** on a terminal surface **28**. The terminals are arranged in a terminal array having a first row of terminals **22a-e** and a second row of terminals **22f-j**. It should be recognized that this is merely an idealized example used to illustrate principles of one embodiment of the invention; the number and arrangement of terminals can be varied as needed for any specific application.

Any suitable microelectronic component **20** may be employed. For example, the microelectronic component **20** may be SIMM, DRAM, flash memory, or a processor. In one embodiment, the microelectronic component **20** is an integrated circuit die bearing a plurality of bond pads, such as

a flip chip die or ball grid array (BGA) die. The microelectronic component **20** is illustrated in the drawings as a single element, but the microelectronic component **20** can comprise any number of sub-components. For example, the microelectronic component **20** may comprise one or more integrated circuit dies attached to a common substrate, such as in a packaged or unpackaged stacked die assembly. In other circumstances, it is desirable to test an entire semiconductor wafer to identify malfunctioning dies prior to singulation. In such a context, the microelectronic component **20** may comprise a semiconductor wafer bearing a plurality of integrated circuit dies.

The interface **50** illustrated in FIG. 3 includes a body **54** carrying a plurality of liquid switches **60a-j**. Each of switches **60** has a contact opening **62** adjacent a confronting surface **56** of the body **54**. Each of the switches **60a-j** includes a conduit **64a-j**, respectively. In one embodiment, each of the conduits **64a-j** is electrically independent and is in communication with a single contact opening **62a-j**, respectively. This need not be the case, though. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 3, many of the switches (e.g., switches **60a-e**) have electrically independent conduits (**64a-e**, respectively) associated therewith. However, switches **60f** and **60i** share a common conduit **64f**. Any suitable arrangement of conduits may be employed to achieve the desired electrical connections via the interface **50**.

The interface **50** includes a plurality of actuators **80a-j**, with each switch **60** being associated with one of the actuators **80**. Hence, switches **60a-e** are each associated with an independent actuator **80a-e**, respectively. Switches **60f** and **60i** may be connected to a common actuator **80f** via the common conduit **64f**. As explained more fully below, the actuators **80** are adapted to move at least one of the switches **60** from a first, unactuated position to a second, actuated position. In one embodiment, each of the actuators **80** is independently controllable to independently actuate the or each associated switch **60**. In another embodiment, all of the actuators **80** may be operated in unison. If so desired, operation of the actuators **80** may be controlled by the controller **30** (FIG. 1). In another embodiment, the actuators **80** may be controlled mechanically, e.g., by mechanically engaging the microelectronic component **20** when it is positioned proximate the interface **50**.

FIGS. 4-6 schematically illustrate operation of one of the liquid switches **60** of the interface **50** in FIG. 3. The switch **60** generally comprises a conduit **64** having a chamber **66** which terminates at a contact opening **62** in the confronting surface **56** of the interface **50**. An electrically conductive liquid **68** is flowably received within the conduit **64**. In one embodiment, the chamber **66** has an enlarged diameter and may serve as a reservoir for a volume of the liquid **68** to help accommodate variations in the operating temperature at which the interface **50** is used. In another embodiment, though, the chamber **66** has the same diameter as the rest of the conduit **64** and the contact opening **62**. Although it is not shown in FIG. 3, the interface **50** may include one or more spacers (**58** in FIGS. 4-6) positioned on the confronting surface **56**. As explained more fully below in connection with FIG. 6, this can help reproducibly position the microelectronic component **20** with respect to the confronting surface **56** of the interface **50**.

The switches **60** may be of any appropriate size and spacing to enable testing of a particular microelectronic component **20**. It is anticipated that switches having contact openings on the order of 20-30 microns and a conduit having the same inner diameter will suffice if the liquid **68**

has suitable electrical conductivity. This can facilitate positioning the contact openings closer to one another for testing microelectronic components with finer-pitch terminals. In one embodiment, the pitch of the contact openings **62** and the interface **50** is 100 microns or less. In one more specific embodiment, the pitch is reduced to about 75 microns or less. This is in contrast to more conventional contacts, which are effectively limited to pitches of about 120 microns or greater for most applications, often 200 microns or greater.

FIG. 5 schematically illustrates the same liquid switch **60** in an actuated condition. In the actuated condition, force is applied to the liquid **68** within the conduit **64**, urging the liquid **68** toward the contact opening **62**. This force, which is schematically shown in FIG. 5 as arrow F, may be exerted on the liquid **68** by the actuator **80** (not shown in FIG. 5). This will urge a quantity of the liquid **68** out of the contact opening **62**. At least to some maximum diameter, surface tension of the liquid **68** will provide a relatively coherent volume of fluid which protrudes outwardly (i.e., upwardly in the orientation of FIG. 5) beyond the confronting surface **56** of the interface **50**. This protruding volume of liquid defines a conformable contact **63** which can relatively readily deform to conform to a surface of a terminal **22** of a microelectronic component **20**. If so desired, the confronting surface **56** of the body **54** may be provided with a coating (not shown) which is non-wettable by the liquid **68** to promote cohesion of the conformable contact **63**.

FIG. 6 schematically illustrates the interface **50** electrically coupled to a microelectronic component **20**. The microelectronic component **20** includes a body **24**, which may comprise a semiconductor substrate **25** having multiple layers of metalization to define integrated circuitry, and a polyimide layer **26** or the like. In this particular embodiment, the terminal **22** takes the form of a bond pad, e.g., a metal bond pad of the type commonly employed in flip chips. The terminal surface **28** of the microelectronic component **20** abuts a surface of the spacer **58**, spacing the terminal surface **28** of the microelectronic component **20** a known distance from the confronting surface **56** of the interface **50**.

The switch **60** is in its actuated position in FIG. 6, similar to that shown in FIG. 5. In this position, the conformable contact **63** spans the gap between the terminal surface **28** and the confronting surface **56**. As a consequence, the electrically conductive liquid **68** of the switch **60** provides a path to electrically connect the interface **50** to the microelectronic component **20**. In the embodiment of FIG. 6, the liquid **68** has a high contact angle with the surface of the terminal **22**. The liquid **68** may have a substantially non-wetting interface with the terminal **22**. In another embodiment, the contact angle between the liquid **68** and the terminal **22** may be lower than illustrated in FIG. 6, which may promote wetting of the terminal **22**.

Because of its flowable nature, the liquid **68** will deform where it is in contact with the terminal **22**. As suggested by comparing FIGS. 5 and 6, the deformed contact **63'** of FIG. 6 has a relatively flat area in direct physical contact with the terminal **22**, which promotes good electrical contact between the liquid **68** and the terminal **22**. Because the liquid **68** is flowable, however, it will not exert any undue physical force against the surface of the terminal **22**. This can limit damage to the terminal **22**, particularly as compared to a more conventional cantilevered wire probe or the like; in many applications, the contact **63'** can adequately contact the terminal **22** substantially without deforming the terminal **22**.

The conformable nature of the contact **63'** can also be more forgiving of microelectronic components with slightly

non-planar terminal surfaces **28**. If the microelectronic component **20** were slightly warped, for example, some of the terminals **22** may be positioned closer to the confronting surface **56** of the interface **50** than shown in FIGS. **6** while other terminals **22** may be spaced somewhat farther away from the confronting surface **56**. The conformable nature of the liquid will allow it to deform more to accommodate the position of terminals that are closer to the confronting surface **56** while still achieving adequate contact with terminals **22** that are spaced farther away.

FIG. **7** schematically illustrates the liquid switch **60** of FIGS. **4–6** in its actuated condition to electrically contact a bumped terminal **22** of a microelectronic component **20**. The microelectronic component **20** in FIG. **7** may be similar to the microelectronic component **20** shown in FIG. **6**. The terminal **22** of FIG. **6** comprises a relatively flat bond pad. In FIG. **7**, however, the terminal **22** includes a solder ball **23**. Such a structure is common in BGA and FBGA chips. In some applications, the microelectronic component **20** may be tested prior to deposition of the solder balls **23**, as illustrated in FIG. **6**, and retested after the solder balls **23** have been applied, as shown in FIG. **7**.

Much like the configuration of FIG. **6**, the liquid **68** extending outwardly beyond the contact surface **56** of the interface body **54** may deform to conform to the surface of the solder ball **23**. The conformable contact **63** shown in FIG. **7** has deformed significantly from the natural spherical structure illustrated in FIG. **5**. Because the liquid **68** is flowable, though, the conformable contact **63** can deform to achieve a good electrical contact with the solder ball **23** without exerting undue force on the solder ball **23**. This can facilitate testing of a bumped microelectronic component **20** even if the solder balls **23** are relatively small and delicate, such as those employed in FBGA chips. Solder balls **23** often form an oxide layer on their outer surface, which can inhibit electrical connection to the solder ball **23**. If so desired, the solder balls **23** may be cleaned using conventional cleaning processes, such as plasma cleaning or chemical reduction, prior to testing with the interface **50**.

Hence, the same electrical switch **60** can be used to test microelectronic components **20** having a variety of terminal configurations. For example, the same switches **60** may be used to test a relatively flat bond pad **22**, as shown in FIG. **6**, and a bumped bond pad bearing a solder ball **23**, as shown in FIG. **7**. Conventional systems tend to be dedicated to a more specific purpose—many test boards designed for use with bumped microelectronic components are incompatible with unbumped microelectronic components, and many test boards designed for use with unbumped microelectronic components would unduly damage bumped terminals.

In selecting a suitable liquid for use as the electrically conductive liquid **68** for the switches **60**, a variety of factors may be taken into account. For example, the liquid **68** may be chemically compatible with the body **54** of the interface **50** and with the terminals **22** and other elements of the microelectronic component **20** to be tested. The liquid **68** may also be selected to remain in liquid form during all anticipated operating temperatures. In one embodiment useful for DRAM testing, the liquid **68** remains in a liquid state between about -20° C. and about 150° C. If the liquid is homogenous, it may have a melting point of -20° C. or less and a boiling point of 150° C. or more. The liquid **68** should also have suitable viscosity and electrical properties (e.g., conductivity) within the anticipated range of operating temperatures.

In one embodiment, the electrically conductive liquid **68** comprises mercury. Mercury has a melting point of about

-39° C. and a boiling point of about 357° C. As a consequence, mercury would remain liquid over a wide range of operating conditions. In another embodiment, the liquid **68** comprises a non-homogenous material, such as a liquid with conductive solid particles suspended therein or an emulsion. A polymer having a suitable viscosity in the anticipated range of operating temperatures and having metal particles suspended therein may suffice.

D. Sealed Contacts

In the embodiments of FIGS. **4–7**, the contact openings **62** of the interface **50** are open, exposing the electrically conductive liquid **68** to the atmosphere and bringing the liquid **68** directly into contact with the terminals **22** of the microelectronic component **20**. FIGS. **8–11** illustrate embodiments of the invention employing liquid switches in which the electrically conductive liquid is substantially sealed from direct physical contact with the microelectronic component **20**. This limits contamination of the electrically conductive liquid, volatilization and evaporation of the liquid, and problems with chemical compatibility between the liquid and the terminals **22** of the microelectronic components **20**.

The interface **100** of FIGS. **8** and **9** includes a switch layer **104** carried on a substrate **120**. The switch layer **104** has a confronting surface **106** spaced from the substrate **120** and a plurality of liquid switches **110** (only one of which is shown in FIG. **8**). The substrate **120** includes a plurality of substrate terminals **122**, with each substrate terminal **122** being in electrical contact with an electrically conductive liquid **118** of one of the switches **110**. The switch **110** may include a conduit **114** in fluid communication with a chamber **116** which extends between the substrate terminal **122** and an opening **112** adjacent the confronting surface **106**. The chamber **116** may have a diameter larger than the rest of the conduit **114** and the opening **112**, as shown. In another embodiment, though, the chamber **116** has a diameter which is substantially the same as the diameter of the rest of the conduit **114** and the opening **112**. The particular embodiment shown in FIGS. **8** and **9** employs a generally T-shaped conduit **114**, with the chamber **116** oriented generally perpendicularly to the rest of the conduit **114**. It should be understood, however, that a variety of other structures may be possible.

The opening **112** in the switch layer **104** is substantially sealed by a flexible member **113**. The flexible member **113** may be sealed to the confronting surface **106** of the switch layer **104** in any suitable fashion, such as by heat sealing or an adhesive. The flexible member **113** should be adapted to deform under pressure of the liquid **118** acting thereon. In one embodiment, the flexible member **113** is also adapted to resiliently return toward the rest configuration shown in FIG. **8** when pressure of the liquid **118** against the flexible member **113** is reduced.

In one embodiment, the flexible member **113** comprises an electrically conductive flexible film that will conduct electricity through its thickness. This flexible film may comprise an elastomer that is electrically conductive or includes an electrically conductive material therein. In one embodiment, the flexible film comprises an elastomer having metal particles dispersed therein in sufficient density to make the film suitably electrically conductive. In another embodiment, the flexible member **113** comprises an elastomeric film with a plurality of metal wires contained therein. These metal wires (not shown in FIGS. **8–9**) may extend through the thickness of the film from an inner surface in contact with the liquid **118** of the switch **110** to an outer surface oriented away from the substrate **120**, yielding a film

with anisotropic conductivity. In one particular adaptation, the flexible member **113** comprises a silicone rubber layer with gold-plated brass wires extending transversely at an angle through the thickness of the film. The gold-plated wires may protrude several microns from the inner and outer surfaces of the silicone rubber layer to facilitate good electrical contact with the liquid **118** and the microelectronics component terminal **22**. Such a flexible film is suggested for use in a different application by Ila PaI in "High-Density Sockets for GHz CSPs," *HDI*, November 2000, at pages 26-29, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference.

The interface **100** of FIGS. **8** and **9** includes an actuator **130** having a housing **132** which slidably carries a button **134**. A piston cylinder **136** may be slidably received within the conduit **114** and be operatively connected to the rest of the actuator **130** by a piston shaft **138**. The housing **132** may include a force transfer mechanism that urges the piston cylinder **136** against the liquid **118** when the button **134** is depressed toward the substrate **120** (i.e., downwardly in FIG. **8**). The transfer mechanism (not specifically shown) may, for example, comprise a hydraulic link, a pneumatic link, or a mechanical link. Hydraulic links may work well for smaller-scale applications.

The button **134** extends outwardly beyond the confronting surface **106** of the switch layer **104**. As illustrated in FIG. **9**, this permits the button **134** to abut the terminal surface **28** of a microelectronic component **20** to be tested. As the microelectronic component **20** is moved into position to juxtapose the terminal surface **28** with the interface confronting surface **106**, the microelectronic component **20** will depress the button **134** toward the substrate **120**. This will, in turn, urge the piston cylinder **136** against the liquid **118**, as schematically indicated by the arrow **F** in FIG. **9**. The pressure of the liquid **118** against the flexible member **113** will cause the flexible member **113** to distend outwardly beyond the confronting surface **106** of the switch layer **104**. When the microelectronic component **20** is moved away from the interface **100**, the button **134** may resiliently return toward the rest configuration shown in FIG. **8**, e.g., by being spring-biased away from the substrate **120**. This can, in turn, reduce pressure of the liquid **118** against the flexible member **113**. In one embodiment, the flexible member **113** is sufficiently resilient to return toward its rest configuration shown in FIG. **8** when the liquid pressure is reduced.

As suggested in FIG. **9**, the flexible member **113** provides a flexible contact surface which can deform to conform to the shape of the terminal **22** of the microelectronic component **20**. The flexible member **113** distends outwardly to bridge the gap between the confronting surface **106** of the interface **100** and the terminal surface **28** of the microelectronic component **20**. A portion of the flexible member **113** is deformed into conforming contact with the surface of the component terminal **22** substantially without deforming the component terminal **22**. Although a relatively flat terminal **22** is shown in FIG. **9**, the same principle can apply to terminals having other shapes, such as a bumped terminal as shown in FIG. **7**.

FIGS. **10** and **11** schematically illustrate a microelectronic component test system in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. This microelectronic component test system includes an interface **150** that is similar in some respects to the interface **100** of FIGS. **8** and **9**. The interface **150** includes a substrate **170** carrying a plurality of substrate terminals **172** and a switch layer **154**. The switch layer **154** includes a plurality of liquid switches **160** (only one of which is shown in FIGS. **10** and **11**). The switches **160** are

actuated by an actuator **180** which includes a housing **182** and a button **184** which is slidable with respect to the housing **182** to move a piston cylinder **186**, using a piston shaft **188**, to exert a force **F** on the cylinder **186**.

One difference between the interface **150** of FIGS. **10** and **11** and the interface **100** of FIGS. **8** and **9** lies in the liquid switch **160**. The liquid switch **160** of FIGS. **10** and **11** includes a conduit **164** having a chamber **166** which extends between the substrate terminal **172** and an opening **162**. A flexible member **163** is attached to the confronting surface **156** of the switch layer **154**. In one embodiment, the flexible member **163** may comprise a small patch of an electrically conductive flexible film, much like the flexible member **113** discussed above. In the embodiment of FIGS. **10** and **11**, though, the flexible member **163** of each liquid switch **160** comprises an area of a continuous electrically insulative film. This film may be sealed to the rest of the switch layer **154** adjacent the contact opening **162** of each of the switches **160**, with the remainder of the electrically insulative film spanning the space between the contact openings **162**. In particular, the illustrated flexible member **163** comprises an electrically insulative elastomeric film having a metalized contact **169** positioned to electrically contact the liquid **168**. In one embodiment, the metalized contact **169** comprises a metal-filled via that extends through the electrically insulative film. The metal may extend laterally beyond the dimensions of the via to expand the useful contact area. Flexible films including such metalized contacts **169** are commercially available from a variety of sources, including Flex2Chip, Inc. of San Jose, Calif., U.S.A. A separate metallized contact **169** may be associated with each of the liquid switches **160**.

The switch **160** also includes an adjustable reservoir **165** disposed along the length of the conduit **164**. In the illustrated embodiment, this reservoir **165** is distinct from the chamber **166** and is spaced therefrom. In another embodiment, the chamber **166** may serve as the adjustable volume reservoir **165**. The volume of the reservoir **165** may be adjusted by occupying part of the reservoir volume with an insert **167** reducing the volume of the electrically conductive liquid **168** in the reservoir **165**.

For example, the insert **167** may be a hydraulically inflatable bladder; inflating the bladder will occupy more of the reservoir **165**. In the illustrated embodiment, the insert **167** may comprise a separate solid or hollow element which can be physically placed in or removed from the reservoir **165**. The switch layer **154** may comprise an inner plate **152** and an outer plate **153**. The inner and outer plates may each have complementary channels that together define the conduit **164** when the two plates **152** and **153** are assembled as shown. By lifting the outer plate **153** away from the inner plate **152**, one can gain access to the reservoir **165** of each of the liquid switches **160** and insert an appropriately sized insert **167** therein.

The insert **167**, as noted above, changes the volume of the liquid switch available to retain the liquid **168**. Many liquids will expand with increasing temperatures. If the interface **150** is to be used at different use temperatures, an appropriately sized insert **167** can be used to adapt the interface **150** for optimum performance at the intended use temperature. FIG. **10** illustrates the interface **150** configured for use at a first temperature. When the button **184** is depressed by the microelectronic component **20**, the piston cylinder **166** will be displaced a fixed distance, driving the flexible member **163** into conforming contact with the terminal **22** of the microelectronic component **20**. If the same interface **150** were used at a lower temperature, the same quantity of liquid

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168 may occupy less space. As a consequence, moving the piston cylinder 186 the same distance in response to depressing the button 184 may be insufficient to establish adequate electrical contact with the terminal 22. The insert 167 may occupy a volume which is correlated to the change in volume of the liquid 168 between the upper and lower temperatures. Hence, the insert 167 allows the conduit 164 to be resized so the performance of the liquid switch 160 will be comparable at different use temperatures. This limits the need for separate, temperature-specific interfaces to test the same microelectronic component configuration at multiple temperatures.

E. Methods

As noted above, some embodiments of the invention provide methods of testing microelectronic components 20. Test interfaces having a conformable contact (or an array of conformable contacts) positioned to contact a terminal on the microelectronic component provide a range of processing possibilities. The following discussion outlines select applications of these test interfaces; other applications for these test interfaces will become apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the present disclosure.

The following discussion refers back to the specific embodiments illustrated in FIGS. 1–11. It should be understood that this is solely for purposes of illustration and that the methods are not to be limited to the specific structures shown in these drawings. In particular, any test interface which is suitable to perform the described function may be employed, even if that test interface differs from the structures outlined above and shown in FIGS. 1–11.

A method of testing a microelectronic component in accordance with one embodiment of the invention may involve juxtaposing a microelectronic component 20 having a plurality of component terminals 22 with an interface (100, for example) having a plurality of liquid switches 110. In particular, the terminal surface 28 of the microelectronic component 20 may be positioned generally parallel to, but spaced from, the confronting surface 106 of the interface 100.

Each of the liquid switches 110 may be brought into electrical contact with an associated one of the component terminals 22 by deforming a contact surface of the switch 110 to conform to a surface of the associated terminal 22. In the embodiment of FIGS. 8 and 9, for example, this may be accomplished as the microelectronic component is brought into position with respect to the interface 100. In particular, the microelectronic component 20 may depress the button 134 of the actuator 130 which, in turn, distends the flexible member 113 outwardly beyond the confronting surface 106 of the interface 100. The flexible member 113 will deform to conform to the surface terminal 22 in response to pressure of the electrically conductive liquid 118 against the flexible member 113.

In another embodiment, positioning the microelectronic component 20 with respect to the interface 100 need not activate the actuators 130. In such an embodiment, the actuators 130 may be selectively activated by a controller (30 in FIG. 1), for example. In this adaptation of the method, the flexible member 113 of each liquid switch 110 may be juxtaposed with, but spaced from, an associated component terminal 22. Thereafter, the flexible members 113 may be distended to establish electrical contact between the liquid switches 110 and the component terminals 22.

With the liquid switches 110 in electrical contact with the microelectronic component terminals 22, electricity may be conducted across the liquid 118 of each of the switches 110, electrically connecting one of the microelectronic compo-

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nent terminals 22 to a signal processor (e.g., processor 32 in FIG. 1). In the embodiment of FIGS. 4–7, each of the electrically independent volumes of conductive liquid 68 may be independently connected to the communication line 34 via circuitry (not shown) within the interface 50. In the embodiments of FIGS. 8–11, the liquid 118 conducts electricity between the microelectronic component terminal 22 and the substrate terminal 122 and the substrate 120 may include suitable circuitry (not shown) to facilitate connection to the communication line 34.

As noted above, the liquid switches 60 of FIGS. 4–7 can establish electrical contact with a terminal 22 of a microelectronic component 20 by direct physical contact of the conductive liquid 68 to the terminal 22. The liquid switches 110 and 160 of FIGS. 8–11 employ a flexible member (113 and 163, respectively) disposed between the electrically conductive liquid and the microelectronic component terminal 22. Hence, the flexible member (113, for example) may serve as an electrical bridge between the liquid 118 and the microelectronic component terminal 22.

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, throughout the description and the claims, the words “comprise,” “comprising,” and the like are to be construed in an inclusive sense as opposed to an exclusive or exhaustive sense; that is to say, in a sense of “including, but not limited to.” Words using the singular or plural number also include the plural or singular number respectively. When the claims use the word “or” in reference to a list of two or more items, that word covers all of the following interpretations of the word: any of the items in the list, all of the items in the list and any combination of the items in the list.

The above detailed descriptions of embodiments of the invention are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed above. While specific embodiments of, and examples for, the invention are described above for illustrative purposes, various equivalent modifications are possible within the scope of the invention, as those skilled in the relevant art will recognize. For example, while steps are presented in a given order, alternative embodiments may perform steps in a different order. Aspects of the invention may also be useful in other applications, e.g., in forming temporary or stress-tolerant electrical contact with a microelectronic component for purposes other than testing. The various embodiments described herein can be combined to provide further embodiments.

In general, the terms used in the following claims should not be construed to limit the invention to the specific embodiments disclosed in the specification, unless the above detailed description explicitly defines such terms. While certain aspects of the invention are presented below in certain claim forms, the inventors contemplate the various aspects of the invention in any number of claim forms. Accordingly, the inventors reserve the right to add additional claims after filing the application to pursue such additional claim forms for other aspects of the invention.

We claim:

1. A temporary interface for a microelectronic component having a plurality of component terminals in a component terminal array, comprising:

- a substrate having a plurality of substrate terminals arranged on a terminal surface of the substrate; and
- a switch layer carrying a plurality of actuatable liquid switches arranged in a switch array corresponding to the component terminal array, each switch being associated with one of the substrate terminals and being adapted to conform to a surface of one of the compo-

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nent terminals to temporarily electrically connect the component terminal to the substrate terminal associated with the switch.

2. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein the liquid switches are actuatable independently of one another.

3. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein the liquid switches are adapted to be actuated in unison.

4. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises a conduit and an electrically conductive liquid contained in the conduit.

5. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises a conduit having a contact end adjacent a confronting surface of the switch layer, an electrically conductive liquid contained in the conduit, and an actuator adapted to move a contact surface of the switch outwardly beyond the confronting surface to contact one of the component terminals.

6. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises a conduit and an electrically conductive liquid contained in the conduit, the liquid remaining in a liquid state in a temperature range of about 20° C. to about 150° C.

7. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises a conduit and liquid mercury contained in the conduit.

8. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises a conduit and an electrically conductive liquid contained in the conduit, the liquid comprising a liquid component having conductive solid particles suspended therein.

9. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises an electrically conductive liquid and an electrically conductive flexible member, the flexible member being adapted to conform to the component terminal surface under pressure of the liquid.

10. The temporary interface of claim 9 wherein the flexible member comprises an elastomeric film.

11. The temporary interface of claim 9 wherein the flexible member comprises an electrically insulative film having a conductive contact positioned to electrically contact the liquid.

12. The temporary interface of claim 1 wherein each of the liquid switches comprises a conduit and an electrically conductive liquid contained in the conduit, the conduit being resizable to accommodate different use temperatures.

13. The temporary interface of claim 1 further comprising a control button adapted to actuate at least one of the liquid switches in response to force of a surface of the microelectronic component against the control button.

14. The temporary interface of claim 1 further comprising a plurality of control buttons, each control button being adapted to actuate an associated liquid switch in response to force of a surface of the microelectronic component against the control button.

15. A temporary interface for a microelectronic component having a plurality of component terminals, comprising:

a substrate having a plurality of substrate terminals arranged on a terminal surface of the substrate; and

a switch layer carrying a plurality of switch means arranged in a switch array, first and second ones of the switch means each being moveable with respect to the substrate from a first position to a second position, wherein the first and second switch means are associated with the substrate terminals and, when in their respective second positions, are adapted to deform to conform to surfaces the component terminals to temporarily electrically connect the component terminals

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to the substrate terminals associated with the first and second switch means.

16. A temporary interface for a microelectronic component, comprising:

a body having a confronting surface;

a plurality of electrically independent conduits, each conduit having a contact end terminating adjacent the confronting surface, the contact ends being arranged in a contact array configured to match a terminal array of component terminals on a microelectronic component;

a first volume of electrically conductive liquid in a first one of the conduits;

a second volume of electrically conductive liquid in a second one of the conduits; and

an actuator means adapted to move the first and second volumes in their respective conduits.

17. The temporary interface of claim 16 wherein the actuator means comprises a first actuator associated with the first conduit and a second actuator associated with the second conduit, each of the first and second actuators being adapted to move a surface of the liquid from a first position to a second position, the liquid surface in its second position extending outwardly beyond the confronting surface.

18. The temporary interface of claim 17 further comprising a button positioned outwardly beyond the confronting surface and adapted to contact a surface of the microelectronic component, the button being operatively associated with at least one of the first and second actuators.

19. The temporary interface of claim 16 further comprising a plurality of electrically conductive flexible members, each of which is associated with one of the contact ends, each flexible member being adapted to conform to a surface of one of the component terminals.

20. The temporary interface of claim 19 further comprising an actuator adapted to move at least one of the flexible members outwardly beyond the confronting surface to contact one of the component terminals.

21. The temporary interface of claim 19 wherein the flexible member comprises an elastomeric film.

22. The temporary interface of claim 16 wherein at least one of the conduits is resizable to accommodate different use temperatures.

23. The temporary interface of claim 16 wherein at least one of the conduits includes a reservoir and an insert in the reservoir to reduce a volume of the liquid in the reservoir.

24. A microelectronic component test system, comprising:

a microelectronic component having a terminal surface and a plurality of terminals arranged in a terminal array on the terminal surface;

a body having a confronting surface, the confronting surface of the body being juxtaposed with the terminal surface of the microelectronic component such that the terminals are spaced from the confronting surface by a gap;

electrically independent first and second conduits carried by the body, each of the first and second conduits having a contact end terminating adjacent the confronting surface at a location proximate an associated one of the microelectronic component terminals;

a first conformable conductor associated with the first conduit and a second conformable conductor associated with the second conduit, each of the first and second conformable conductors comprising a volume of electrically conductive liquid in the associated conduit; and

an actuator associated with the first conduit and adapted to actuate the first conductor from a first position to a second position.

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25. The microelectronic component test system of claim 24 wherein each of the first and second conformable conductors includes a contact surface conforming to a surface of one of the microelectronic component terminals.

26. The microelectronic component test system of claim 24 wherein the liquid of the first conformable conductor extends across the gap between the terminal surface and the confronting surface into physical contact with a surface of one of the microelectronic component terminals.

27. The microelectronic component test system of claim 26 wherein the microelectronic component terminal surface is not wettable by the liquid.

28. The microelectronic component test system of claim 24 wherein each of the first and second conformable conductors includes an electrically conductive flexible member disposed between the liquid and the microelectronic component.

29. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein at least one of the flexible members is in electrical contact with one of the microelectronic component terminals.

30. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein each of the first and second flexible members is in electrical contact with a different one of the microelectronic component terminals.

31. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein each of the first and second flexible members is adapted to conform to a surface of one of the microelectronic component terminals.

32. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein the first and second flexible members each comprise an elastomeric film.

33. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein the first and second flexible members each comprise an electrically insulative film having a metallized contact positioned to electrically contact the liquid.

34. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein both of the flexible members comprise areas of a continuous film, with each flexible member sealing the associated contact end.

35. The microelectronic component test system of claim 28 wherein both of the flexible members comprise areas of an electrically insulative continuous film, each flexible member having a conductive contact positioned to electrically contact the liquid.

36. The microelectronic component test system of claim 24 wherein the actuator is adapted to move the associated conformable conductor from the first position to the second position by moving the liquid, the conformable conductor in its second position electrically contacting one of the microelectronic component terminals.

37. The microelectronic component test system of claim 24 wherein at least one of the conduits is resizable to accommodate different use temperatures.

38. The microelectronic component test system of claim 24 wherein at least one of the conduits includes a reservoir and an insert in the reservoir to reduce a volume of the liquid in the reservoir.

39. A microelectronic component test system, comprising:
a body having a confronting surface;
a conduit carried by the body;
an electrically conductive liquid in the conduit; and
an electrically conductive flexible member carried by the body adjacent the confronting surface and adapted to resiliently return from a distended position toward a relaxed position, the flexible member assuming the distended position in response to pressure of the liquid

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against the flexible member, the flexible member being adapted to conform to a surface of a terminal of a microelectronic component when in the distended position.

40. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 further comprising a microelectronic component having a component surface juxtaposed with the confronting surface and spaced therefrom by a gap.

41. The microelectronic component test system of claim 40 wherein the flexible member, in its distended position, spans the gap and conforms to the surface of the terminal of the microelectronic component.

42. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 wherein the body carries a body terminal spaced from the flexible member and the liquid electrically connects the flexible member to the body terminal.

43. The microelectronic component test system of claim 42 wherein the flexible member in its distended position is adapted to electrically connect the body terminal to the microelectronic component terminal across a gap between the confronting surface and the microelectronic component terminal.

44. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 wherein the flexible member in its distended position extends outwardly beyond the confronting surface.

45. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 further comprising an actuator adapted to act against the liquid to move the flexible member from the rest position to the distended position.

46. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 wherein the flexible member comprises an elastomeric film.

47. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 wherein the flexible member comprises an electrically insulative film having a metallized contact positioned to electrically contact the liquid.

48. The microelectronic component test system of claim 39 wherein the conduit includes a reservoir and an insert in the reservoir to reduce a volume of the liquid in the reservoir.

49. A method of testing a microelectronic component having a plurality of component terminals on a component surface, comprising:

juxtaposing the microelectronic component with an interface having an interface surface and a plurality of liquid switches, the component surface being spaced from the interface surface;

actuating first and second ones of the liquid switches to electrically contact each of the first and second switches to an associated one of the component terminals by deforming a contact surface of each of the first and second switches to conform to a surface of the associated component terminal without substantially deforming the component terminals; and

conducting electricity across an electrically conductive liquid of each of the first and second switches, the liquid of each switch electrically connecting the component terminal juxtaposed with the switch to a test terminal carried by the test interface.

50. The method of claim 49 further comprising moving each of the first and second switches to a retracted configuration by moving a surface of the electrically conductive liquid of the switch away from the microelectronic component.

51. The method of claim 49 wherein the contact surface of each of the first and second switches comprises a surface of the electrically conductive liquid of the switch, the liquid surface deforming to conform to the associated component terminal surface.

52. The method of claim 51 wherein the liquid directly contacts, but does not wet, the component terminal surface.

53. The method of claim 49 wherein the contact surface of each of the first and second switches comprises an electrically conductive flexible member, deforming the contact surface to conform to the associated component terminal surface comprising deforming the flexible member in response to pressure of the liquid against the flexible member.

54. The method of claim 49 wherein each of the first and second switches is juxtaposed with, but spaced from, the associated component terminal prior to electrically contacting the liquid switches to the associated component terminals.

55. The method of claim 49 wherein the interface includes an actuator button positioned to contact the component surface of the microelectronic component, electrically contacting each switch to the associated component terminal comprising forcing the microelectronic component against the actuator button to urge the contact surfaces of the switches outwardly beyond the interface surface.

56. A method of testing a microelectronic component having a component terminal on a component surface, comprising:

juxtaposing the microelectronic component with an interface having an interface surface, a conduit, an electrically conductive liquid in the conduit, and an electrically conductive flexible member, a surface of the component terminal being spaced from the flexible member by a gap;

distending the flexible member across the gap into conforming contact with the component terminal surface; and

conducting electricity across the flexible member with the flexible member in contact with the component terminal surface, the liquid and the flexible member electrically connecting the component terminal to a test terminal carried by the interface.

57. The method of claim 56 wherein the flexible member is distended under pressure of the liquid against the flexible member.

58. The method of claim 57 further comprising reducing pressure of the liquid against the flexible member, allowing the flexible member to resiliently move away from the component terminal.

59. An interface for a microelectronic component, comprising a plurality of actuatable liquid switches arranged in a switch array, wherein at least one of the liquid switches comprises an electrically conductive liquid and an electrically conductive flexible member, the flexible member being adapted to conform to a surface of a component terminal carried by the component to temporarily electrically connect the component terminal to the electrically conductive liquid.

60. The interface of claim 59 wherein the conduits are formed in a body having a surface, further comprising an actuator adapted to move the flexible member outwardly beyond the surface of the body to contact the component terminal.

61. The temporary interface of claim 59 wherein the flexible member comprises an elastomeric film.

62. A temporary interface for a microelectronic component carrying terminals, comprising a plurality of electrically independent conduits in a body, the conduits carrying an electrically conductive liquid and having contact ends terminating adjacent a surface of the body, and a plurality of electrically conductive flexible members associated with the contact ends of the conduits, the flexible members being adapted to deform to conform to surfaces of the terminals to electrically connect the electrically conductive liquid to the microelectronic component.

63. The temporary interface of claim 62 further comprising an actuator adapted to move at least one of the flexible members outwardly beyond the confronting surface to contact one of the terminals of the component.

64. The temporary interface of claim 62 wherein the flexible members comprise an elastomeric film.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 6,913,476 B2
DATED : July 5, 2005
INVENTOR(S) : Tay Wuu Yean et al.

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 13,
Line 37, "films" should be -- film --.

Signed and Sealed this

Eighth Day of November, 2005

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon W. Dudas". The signature is stylized, with a large loop for the letter 'J' and a cursive 'D'.

JON W. DUDAS
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office